

FOREIGN RELATIONS

The life of the Ch'ing dynasty was prolonged not only by the opportune suppression of internal rebellion, but also by the absence of crises in the Empire's relations with Occidental powers so grave as those of 1839-1842 and 1856-1860. While not entirely satisfactory to Westerners, the treaties which came as the result of these wars at least promised the removal of most of the chief complaints which the aliens had against their former status in China. Neither the officials nor the populace of the Empire were yet prepared to be cordial to foreigners, and friction was often acute over the attempt of Westerners to obtain what had been pledged them. The Westerner, too, was still aggressive. He often wished greater privileges than those already his and on more than one occasion encroached on the territory of the Empire. However, for several years after 1860 Western powers, and especially Great Britain and the United States, conducted their relations with China on the basis of the belief that their interests would be best served by supporting the dignity and authority of the imperial government to strengthen it in the suppression of internal disorder. Now that China had granted terms which made possible the growth and fairly peaceable conduct of foreign trade, those powers whose primary concern was commerce, notably Great Britain, decided that this would be best conserved through a united and orderly China, and that the most promising outlook was under the Ch'ing dynasty. Between 1861 and 1895 China suffered no such humiliation at the hands of the Occident as she experienced just before and after these years.

Had the court and the leading statesmen been aware of the sig-

nificance of the pressure from the West and set out wholeheartedly to reorganize the Empire and its culture, learning all that they could from the alien, as the Japanese were doing during these very years, the distresses of the next generation might conceivably have been avoided. Given the cultural pride of the ruling scholar-official class, however, and the decadent ineptitude of most of the Manchus, this was too much to expect. Only a very few, and those usually with but little if any influence, were aware that the Empire was being hurried into a new world to which it must make revolutionary adjustments or suffer overwhelming dis-